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AUTHOR	Fincher, Cameron
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the interrelated components of institutional structure and administrative leadership within colleges and universities, focusing on the relationship between presidential qualifications and institutional structure. It examines the differing characteristics and qualifications of presidents of institutions that are members of the Association of American Universities (AAU), the National Association of State Universities and Landgrant Colleges (NASULGC), the American Association of Colleges (AAC), and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). These organizations represent, respectively, large private research universities, large public research universities, smaller private comprehensive universities, and smaller public comprehensive universities. By reviewing presidential biographies in various national directories, it was found that presidents at AAU institutions earned their highest degrees from more prestigious universities while presidents of AASCU institutions were least likely to earn their highest degree from prestigious universities. The paper concludes that while institutional prestige remains an appreciable factor in the appointment of presidents, the academic discipline or scholarly productivity of candidates is much less relevant. It also points to the need to streamline the presidential selection process, reduce the turnover of institutional leadership, and avoid perpetuating stereotypical profiles of suitable presidents. (Contains 11 references.) (MDM)

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PRESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

by
Cameron Fincher

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The University of Georgia
Institute of Higher Education
Athens, GA 30602-1772

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PRESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

In American universities and colleges there is evidence and experience to affirm the hypothesis that institutional effectiveness, however defined, is related to: (a) the structure, missions, organization, and traditions of institutions, and (b) the individual characteristics of institutional leaders. In turn, an abundance of empirical research demonstrates that the effectiveness of institutional leaders is related to personal qualities, situational demands, and organizational characteristics. For college or university presidents in general, personal qualities and role behavior are important determinants of effective performance and the basis, quite often, for public perceptions of institutional effectiveness, status, and prestige.[1]

Evidence of the influence of institutional structure, organization, and governance is less substantial, but there are many indications that organizational structure is related to the effectiveness of institutions in general and to the effectiveness of presidents, deans, and department heads in particular. Governing boards (and faculties) often support new presidents in the reorganization of their administrative staffs and in the reappointment of key administrators at the vice presidential level. They will not support the same president in the widespread reappointment of academic department heads, as this is too close to college curricula and other faculty prerogatives. But beyond this, few efforts are made to assess or evaluate the organizational structure of institutions with serious intent of restructuring the hierarchical arrangement of departments, divisions, and colleges. Foundations and federal funding agencies, however, know from experience that the objectives, priorities, and resources of funded projects can be displaced by the hierarchical structure of research universities.[2]

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the interrelated components of institutional structure and administrative leadership. The organization, missions, and traditions of U.S. colleges and universities often interact with the professional experience and personal agendas of presidents to produce unintended and unexpected outcomes. As a result, we may infer that some presidents serve effectively in some institutions, but their appointment to other institutions would be disastrous.[3]

Institutional Structure

The organizational structure of U.S. universities and colleges is seen in the Carnegie Classification as: (a) research universities, (b) doctoral-granting universities, (c) comprehensive universities and colleges, (d) liberal arts colleges, and (e) two-year, community, or technical colleges. Research, doctoral-granting, and comprehensive universities are classified further as Level I and Level II institutions, depending upon size, control, and functions (as seen in such variables as enrollment, financial support, and the number of doctoral degrees conferred). Included at each level are institutions that are regarded as private and institutions that are regarded as public.[4] Thus, a two-by-five matrix would contain the majority of American colleges and universities.

For the purposes of this study, a more useful classification of institutions has been derived from the membership lists of the Association of American Universities (AAU), the National Association of State Universities and Landgrant Colleges (NASULGC), the American Association of Colleges (AAC)[5], and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). To a certain extent, the institutional members of these associations classify themselves by voluntarily joining the association that represents their major interests. When the overlapping membership of AAU with NASULGC institutions, and AAC with AASCU institutions, are eliminated, four kinds of institutions, reflecting mission and governance, are identified: (a) large/private research universities, (b) large/public research universities, (c) smaller/private comprehensive universities, and (d) smaller/public comprehensive universities. The mutual interests of the separate institutions are suggested by similar structural characteristics and by their affiliation with each other. Given such a matrix, the major effects of institutional size, governance, mission, and traditions on presidential leadership can be studied, and the possibilities of interesting interactive effects can be explored.

A secondary objective here is to identify sources of information that are available to members of governing boards and search committees who are initially responsible for administrative appointments.[6] Another objective is to encourage a more critical attitude toward personal qualities that are too often taken for granted—or dismissed as irrelevant, even though they influence interview

impressions and other subjective judgments concerning the professional qualifications of presidential candidates.

Presidential Qualifications

An added convenience of studying the presidents of AAU, NASULGC, AASCU, and AAC institutions is the fact that most are sufficiently visible to make the study of selected characteristics "non-intrusive." In brief, from biographical data in *Who's Who in America* (and other national directories) it is possible to identify: (a) institutions from which they received doctoral degrees, (b) academic disciplines or professional specialties in which they earned graduate degrees, (c) previous positions held (career paths or patterns), and (d) signs of their scholarship or professional productivity (especially if they are authors of books that can be located).[7] Also, it is possible to determine from associational newsletters, bulletins, and other publications the extent to which some presidents are clearly visible in associational matters, on national commissions, or on other committees concerned with public policy issues in higher education.

In the following discussion of selected characteristics, four simple rating scales have been used in assessing institutional prestige, academic disciplines, scholarly productivity, and career patterns, as they relate to presidential leadership. Each characteristic has been rated on a four-point scale for individual presidents in the following manner:

1. *Institutional Prestige*: the perceived status or reputation of institutions (at which presidents received their highest degree) has been rated 4.0 when the institution is clearly a major, top-flight, research university (e.g. Harvard, Chicago, California at Berkeley) and 1.0 when a newcomer to university status (e.g. regional state universities that have recently acquired the right to confer doctoral degrees). Other universities are rated 3.0 or 2.0, according to their perceived similarities to institutions rated 4.0 or 1.0 in the study.
2. *Academic Discipline*: the academic disciplines or professional fields in which presidents specialized have been rated according to their perceived standing in the university's traditional curriculum. As a rule of thumb, the sciences and

humanities have been given a higher rating (4.0) than the behavioral sciences (3.0). In similar manner, professional and applied fields of study, such as business and education, received a higher rating (2.0) than recently established or unusual or overly specialized fields.

3. *Scholarly Productivity*: the ratings for scholarship and research ranged from books and journal articles of undoubted merit (4.0) through books, monographs, and professional journal articles of appreciable merit (3.0) and publications in popular or lesser-known media (2.0) to a lack of evidence concerning publication related to the individual's academic discipline or to higher education in general.
4. *Professional Experience*: clearly established career paths to a university or college presidency received a rating of 4.0 when two or more prior appointments suggested a logical progression. A rating of 1.0 was given when previous professional experience had been external to institutions of higher education or highly unusual. Intermediate ratings were given for career patterns less clearly established but obviously related to academic administration.

Presidential Profiles

The advantages of simplified scales for the above variables can be seen in the information they contribute to presidential profiles and their use in presidential appointments. Demographic variables, such as age, sex, and race, provide interesting information about presidents in general, but they do *not* provide useful information about the personal qualifications and professional competence of presidential candidates. Institutions and academic disciplines (in which candidates earn their highest degree), scholarly productivity, and professional experience should give governing boards and advisory committees information that is relevant to assessments of professional qualifications.[8]

Thus presidential profiles should be regarded as a promising lead and not as a statement of job specifications. Elsewhere this author[9] has suggested that presidential profiles should spur further research on personal qualities and job performance, as they relate to presidential leadership. For governing boards and selection committees, presidential profiles should encourage a more effective

use of interviews and recommendations in which further and more relevant information should be obtained on promising candidates.

The value of profiles for presidents (in the four groups identified) may lie in the inferences—or hypotheses—they permit us to make about the relationships between the formal preparation and professional experience of presidents and organizational features of the institutions they lead. As shown in Table 1, there is enough variation in the mean ratings to invite further inquiry into presidential qualifications, as reflected by selected variables—*and* institutional structure, as reflected in a four-fold classification of institutions. Thus, the following profiles can be briefly stated:

- Presidents of large, private research (AAU) universities earn their highest degree in a more prestigious university than their AAC, NASUGLC, and AASCU cohorts, but they do *not* major in academic disciplines that are strikingly different. Their scholarly productivity is noticeably higher and was, in all probability, an influential factor in their appointment. Their career patterns do not differ dramatically, but their ascendancy to presidential status is much more likely to be along academic and traditional lines.
- Presidents of large, *public* research (NASULGC) universities are likely to earn their highest degrees at landgrant universities that may not be as prestigious as an AAU institution. Neither the difference in institutional prestige nor the difference in academic discipline, however, is statistically significant. The scholarly productivity of NASULGC presidents is lower than that of AAU presidents but higher than that of AASCU and AAC presidents. Their career patterns suggest a logical progression through administrative ranks.
- Presidents of smaller, *private*, comprehensive (AAC) universities earn their highest degree at institutions slightly more prestigious than NASUGLC and AASCU presidents. With respect to academic disciplines, they are more likely to major in the sciences and humanities than AAU, NASULGC, or AASCU presidents. In scholarly productivity, AAC presidents slightly exceed AASCU presidents but not AAU and NASULGC presidents. The career patterns of AAC presidents suggest a more rapid rise to presidential duties

in the fact that some have held no more than one previous administrative appointment.

- Presidents of smaller, *public* comprehensive (AASCU) universities are the least likely (of the four groups) to earn their highest degree at a prestigious university, but they follow a more logical career path to their respective presidencies. The academic disciplines in which they major are similar to those of NASULGC presidents, but their scholarly productivity is at a level comparable to that of AAC presidents.

When institutional membership in AAU, NASULGC, AASCU, and AAC is treated as dichotomous criteria, there is a significant correlation: (a) between institutional prestige and membership in AAU (+ .22) and AASCU (-.25), (b) between academic discipline and membership in AAC (+.10), (c) between scholarly productivity and AAU (+.18) and AASCU (-.15), and (d) between career pattern and membership in AASCU (+.12). None of the coefficients are dramatic—but given the restriction of range imposed by a four-point scale for ratings and a two-point scale for associational membership, statistically significant coefficients should arouse our curiosity.

Knowing that institutions of higher education prefer presidential candidates from similar institutions, no one should be surprised that AAU presidents have earned their highest degrees at prestigious universities and AASCU presidents have earned their highest degrees at lesser-known universities. And it is logical that presidents of AAC institutions have majored in those disciplines for which their institutions are best known. Similarly we would expect AAU presidents to be more productive in research and scholarship, but a negative correlation for AASCU presidents would not be expected until we look at the positive coefficient for career pattern. Having the best defined career pattern among the four groups, AASCU presidents could lead us to believe that they were selected for their administrative experience and *not* for their scholarly productivity. Indeed, we could speculate that although many AASCU presidents do not have the advantages of graduate work at prestigious universities, traditional academic disciplines, or a long list of scholarly publications, they have advanced in notable manner through administrative ranks to achieve AASCU presidencies.

TABLE 1
Mean Ratings of Presidential Characteristics for Public-vs-Private and Large-vs-Smaller Universities

	PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS	PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
Large Research Universities (n = 131)	M_{IP} = 3.3 M_{AD} = 3.0 M_{SP} = 2.3 M_{CP} = 3.4 (n = 55)	M_{IP} = 2.7 M_{AD} = 2.9 M_{SP} = 1.9 M_{CP} = 3.5 (n = 76)
Smaller Comprehensive Universities or Colleges (n = 315)	M_{IP} = 2.8 M_{AD} = 3.2 M_{SP} = 1.8 M_{CP} = 3.3 (n = 123)	M_{IP} = 2.3 M_{AD} = 2.9 M_{SP} = 1.7 M_{CP} = 3.6 (n = 192)

M_{IP} = Mean rating for prestige of institution at which presidents earned highest academic degree

M_{AD} = Mean rating of the traditional standing for academic disciplines in which presidents majored

M_{SP} = Mean rating of the president's scholarly productivity, as judged from publications

M_{CP} = Mean rating of career paths, as judged in terms of the professional experience gained

Unfortunately for our purposes in this paper, neither the ratings nor the correlation coefficients tell us what took place in the recruitment, selection, and appointment of the individual presidents in this particular study. We do not know if AASCU governing boards and screening committees actively recruited presidents with "well defined administrative career patterns." Nor do we know if AAC faculty committees insisted on presidents with "traditional academic credentials." We can be reasonably sure that AAU screening committees were aware of the universities attended by viable candidates and "attentive" to their scholarly productivity. And we can be quite sure that committees recommending the appointment of AASCU presidents did not justify their choice in terms of administrative experience *only*. To the contrary, it is most likely that institutional prestige and scholarly productivity were perceived quite differently from the manner in which the rating scales were developed.

Continuing Implications

The implications to be drawn from this kind of research are, in several ways, more important than any findings reported here. There is much to suggest that further inquiry and analysis would be enlightening, and there are reasons to believe that such research would lead to a better understanding of personal and professional experiences *as* presidential qualifications. Taking at face value the many changes taking place in higher education, the continued study of presidential qualifications and institutional characteristics should turn up findings and principles that would interest members of governing boards, advisory councils, and selection committees who participate in presidential appointments.[10]

With recognition that the author's professional experience might introduce a bit of bias, the following implications will serve as a summary of this particular paper:

1. *Institutional Prestige* is an appreciable factor in the appointment of presidents when members of governing or coordinating boards and faculty members are attentive to the prestige of their own institutions. The consistency with which presidents are recruited from similar (and slightly more prestigious) institutions suggests that the appointment of a new president is an opportunity to enhance the institution's

status, reputation, or public image. Quite often the choice of a new president is a calculated effort to "restore" prestige that may have been lost in dismissing the previous president. News releases inevitably report the institutions at which newly appointed presidents have earned degrees; more often than not, when a graduate of some prestigious institution is appointed, "self-congratulations" will be evident.

2. *Academic Discipline* remains a tenuous variable in the appointment of presidents. The diversity of presidential major fields can be interpreted as "healthy," but the relevance of academic disciplines and professional specialties are overshadowed by institutional prestige. Graduates of excellent programs in lesser-known universities are not always competitive with graduates of mediocre programs in better-known institutions. With respect to the institutions included in this study, academic discipline should weigh more heavily in presidential appointments because it should have more influence on the personal and professional development of individuals than institutional prestige *per se*.
3. *Scholarly Productivity* is not a qualification that is worthy of vigorous pursuit by members of governing or coordinating boards—*or* faculty committees. The former may not be "qualified" to evaluate the publications of many candidates—and the latter have too many biases that are peculiar to their own fields of specialization. Nonetheless, there is much to be said for "advancement through faculty ranks." Presidential candidates who have run the gauntlet of faculty promotion committees are better prepared to understand faculty prerogatives and privileges. No president of a reputable college or university should be appointed without suitable credentials for senior faculty status—but something other than publications (as a faculty member) should serve as criteria.
4. *Career Patterns* are obviously relevant, but there is great need for further study. Increasingly, presidents are appointed without offers of tenure as faculty members, and higher salaries are often justified on fallacious comparisons with chief-executive-officers and football coaches. By serving "at the pleasure of the board," presidents are presumably

expendable, and *ipso facto* they should be compensated for the risks they take. Very little is known, however, about the relative effectiveness of different paths to a college presidency—and many presidential appointments will continue to be made on the basis of "hear-say" evidence concerning the administrative competence and professional experience of external candidates.

Generally speaking, studies of institutional structure and presidential characteristics have many implications that should be considered. The organization, governance, mission, and traditions of institutions deserve better attention in virtually all presidential appointments. The professional qualifications of presidential candidates deserve closer observation and more systematic study. Concerted efforts should be made to analyze and interpret the relationship between presidential qualifications, as judged at the time of appointment, and presidential performance, as evaluated at the time of resignation or reassignment. Similarly, critical analysis and interpretation should be directed to the influence of organizational and administrative structure on changes in presidential leadership. All such efforts should throw additional light on the interrelated features of institutional characteristics and presidential qualifications.

Given more sustained efforts to study presidential leadership, in particular, the following "hypotheses" could be tested:

1. The recruitment, search, screening, selection, and appointment of college and university presidents is an elongated process that urgently needs renovation.
2. The average tenure of office for presidents is much too brief and a reduction in the turnover of institutional leadership would be beneficial to all constituencies in higher education.
3. Idealistic notions of charismatic, visionary, and empowering leadership cannot be verified by objective methods of inquiry and analysis.
4. Presidential profiles are useful *only when* they do not perpetuate stereotypes and the biases of faculty committees.

And finally, given the tendency of screening committees to prefer candidates from similar institutions, there are many reasons to believe that AASCU, AAC, and NASULGC institutions would be wise to pool their resources and expertise in an active concern with "the next generation of leaders." As sociocultural institutions, each should be actively concerned with the education and development of its own leaders. And as urged on other occasions[11], all such efforts should focus on administrative, organizational, and governance issues, as opposed to "techniques and styles of leadership" that may *not* be adaptable to institutions of higher learning.

ENDNOTES

1 Cameron Fincher. "Administrative Leadership in Higher Education." (John C. Smart, ed. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research.* Vol. III. New York: Agathon Press).

2 _____. "University-Government Relations and Academic Organization." (Paper presented at the Ninth EAIR Forum in August 1987).

3 _____ and Larry G. Jones, "Less Administration and More Leadership." (Paper presented at the 16th Annual EAIR Forum in Amsterdam August 1994).

4 *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education: 1994 Edition.* (Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1994).

5 The American Association of Colleges (AAC) is now known as the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

6 Marlene Ross, Madeleine F. Greene, and Cathy Henderson. *The American College President: 1993 Edition.* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1993).

7 One reason for the author's use of "nonobtrusive indicants" is his deeply intrenched suspicion of attitudes, beliefs, and opinions, as expressed in personal interviews to relatively naive interviewers; researchers should *never* forget that the granting of interviews to reporters and researchers is a part of presidential role behavior.

8 Cameron Fincher. "Being, Becoming, and Behaving: Key Indicators in Presidential Leadership." (Paper presented at the 28th Annual Meeting of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in San Francisco on November 20, 1989).

9 _____. "The Demographics of Presidential Leadership." (*Research in Higher Education*, 1988, 29, 92-96).

10 _____. "Theory and Research in Administrative Leadership." (John C. Smart, ed. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. Vol. XI. New York: Agathon Press).

11 _____. "Cooperative Strategies in Administrative Leadership." (Paper presented at the 14th Annual EAIR Forum in Brussels in September 1992).

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